Prince of Wales: Glyndŵr's birth right

Michael Owen

In recent times the wider public has found access to genealogical material. It has enabled flourishing academics the facility to research and analyse, to further our knowledge of the events from the past. Sometimes however political views have intervened, and opinions dominate over facts. This has clearly happened in the case of Owain Glyndŵr's claimed birth right, as modern literature is at odds with the historical documentation of the Herald Bards. This article examines discrepancies in recent publications and offers a considered view of the material.

INTRODUCTION

For many centuries the pedigrees of ancient Welsh rulers were carefully preserved by their descendants and clerical authorities throughout the realm. Although in 1584 Powel published the original history of Cambria,[1] the dawn of the 19th century saw printed journals and books more widely available. Patronage of learned institutions however generally remained within the gentry. It is of no surprise therefore that one of the main preoccupations was genealogy and the pursuit and publication of their exalted lineages. Many scholarly works were published that illuminated the dramatic, turbulent and fascinating history of the country.

DISAGREEMENT

One article, published in 1820 by Idris in *The Cambro-Britain*,[2] took as its subject the claim of Owain Glyndŵr as legitimate ruler of the Principality. Idris quoted from Powel's history: 'By these pedigrees it is evident that the title which Owain Glyndŵr pretended to the Principality of Wales was altogether frivolous; for he was not descended of the house of North Wales by his father, but of a younger brother of the house of Powys'. Again: 'I know none, which are lawfully descended from Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, but such as are come out of the house of Mortimer; in which house, by order of descent, the right of the inheritance lieth'. Idris took issue with Powel and asserted that: 'Gruffydd, son of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, was not base born, and that Davydd ab Llywelyn, his half-brother, succeeded his father in the Principality, to the exclusion of Gruffydd, owing entirely to his superior interest with his uncle Henry III, king of England. Then, Gruffydd being legitimate, his son Llywelyn must have a claim paramount to that of the Mortimers descended from Gwladus, the sister of Gruffydd. Catherine, daughter of the last Llywelyn, by Eleanor, daughter of Simon de Montfort, married Philip ab Ivor, lord of Iscoed, in Cardiganshire, and had issue Eleanor Goch, who married Tomas ap Llywelyn, a lineal descendant of Rhys ap Tewdwr, Prince of South Wales, and had issue Helen, who married Gruffydd Vychan, Lord of Glyndyfrdwy and Cynllaith, who had issue, among others, Owain Glyndŵr'.

Idris quotes the source of this pedigree: the report of the commission of Henry VII, who, shortly after his accession to the throne, gave the Commissioners instruction to: 'diligently search the archives of Wales, that he might know who his grandfather (Owain Tudur) was'.

The Commissioners' report, over a century later was appended to Dwnn's *Heraldic Visitations*[3] which was conducted between the years 1586 and 1613, edited by Meyrick and published in Volume I (pp. xiv-xx). At that time, Lewys Dwnn was the Deputy Herald for Wales. The pedigree chart in the Appendix to this article is constructed in accordance with that work.

An illuminated manuscript[4] produced in 1641 by George Owen of Henllys, York Herald, also shows the same lineages.

FURTHER CONFLICT

With the pursuit of genealogy flourishing, additional works began to appear. In 1876, a seminal work was published by Bridgeman, namely: *The History of the Princes of South Wales*,[5] Bridgeman too, disputed the heraldic lineage, this time proffering a different argument saying: 'This lady, although she appears in numerous Pedigrees, and even in Historical works of some weight, as wife to Philip ap Ivor, and mother of his daughter Eleanor wife of Thomas ap Llewelyn ap Owen, had really no existence except in the brain of the Welsh Genealogists'. Bridgeman had denied the existence of Catherine, daughter of the last Llywelyn (Lywelyn II) on the basis that the lineage of her husband Philip ab Ivor could not be established with certainty. An article by Vaughan[6] subsequently appeared in 1889 saying: 'The Princess Catharine, sole daughter and heir of Prince Llewelyn, a lady whose existence is ignored by English writers, married Philip ab Ivor, Lord of Iscoed, who lived about 1330'. Vaughan provided an extended analysis for the various ancestors of Philip.

In 1911, Lloyd in his *History of Wales*,[7] identified yet another Philip ab Ifor, one who acted as emissary for Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, Prince of North Wales (Llywelyn I). This Philip ab Ifor was also later seen from ancient manuscripts[8] to have acted as emissary for Llywelyn I's son

Daffydd ap Llywelyn, the subsequent Prince of North Wales. Lloyd however continued to deny Catherine's existence, and in a publication of 1918[9] said, when writing of Gruffydd Fychan II (father of Glyndŵr): 'genealogists of a later age are not content even with this distinction; they proceed to heighten its effect by alleging that Helen was descended on her mother's side from a daughter of the last Llywelyn, so making Glyn Dŵr represent Gwynedd as well as the other two principalities. But there is no evidence that Llywelyn had any daughter but Gwenllian, born in the last year of his life and after his death confined for the rest of her days as a nun of the order of Sempringham'. Lloyd surprisingly, did not expand upon his assertion.

Given that there were now two Philip ab Ifors to consider, each closely associated with the Welsh Princes, the elder indisputably being recorded in the annals, Lloyd seemed to ignore the obvious conclusion that Philip ab Ifor the younger was the grandson of Philip ab Ifor the elder.

LLYWELYN AB OWAIN

Whilst a number of authors rejected Glyndŵr's claim to Gwynedd through the lineage of Catherine, they ignored the equally relevant line recorded by the Heralds from Glyndŵr through Llywelyn ab Owain Lord of Iscoed to Llywelyn I (see Appendix). The lineage is traceable through Dwnn's work,[3,10] and also in Brogyntyn I.15, the 16th century manuscript (Fig. 1).[11]

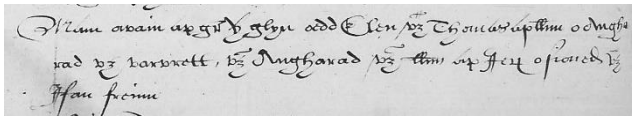

Fig. 1. *Glyndŵr to Llywelyn ab Owain to Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to king John*

Llywelyn ab Owain had acceded to the Lordship of Iscoed Uwch Hirwern in 1279 upon achieving his majority. At the same time he paid homage to king Edward, having previously been his ward.[12] Prior to that, Philip ab Ifor had been accorded the title Lord of Iscoed, however that may have been associated with Ifor rather than Philip as the chronology would otherwise overlap.

GLYNDŴR'S CONDUCT

In 1406 Glyndŵr, as the Prince of Wales, wrote to the king of France requesting military assistance. It is recorded[13] that he appealed his case by recollecting the aid provided by Yeuain de Galles: 'to whom he had succeeded by right of inheritance'. Yeuain de Galles, also known as Owain Lawgoch (see Appendix) had been ousted from his estates and fled to France with a company of Welshmen where he supported the king of France in his military campaigns.

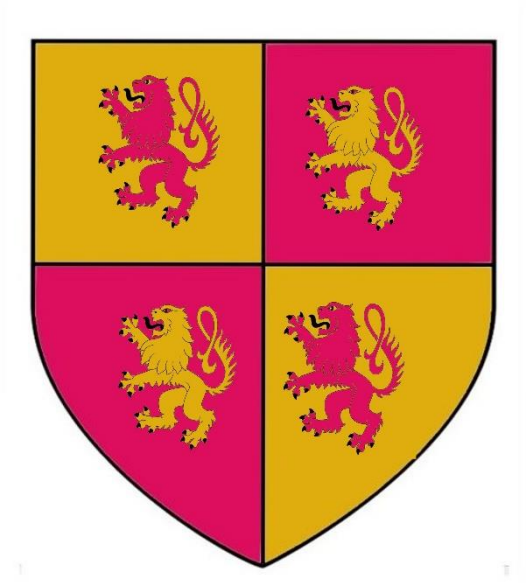

Fig. 2. *Arms: Llywelyn ap Gruffydd*

In 1378 however, he was assassinated upon orders from the English Crown. Glyndŵr as successor, then acceded to the title Prince of Wales.

Glyndŵr also brandished the Coat of Arms (Fig. 2) previously borne by Llywelyn II and Owain Lawgoch, the late holders of the title. The Arms were particularly prominent on his great seal which he used for the treaty with the king of France in 1404. From his experience at the High Court of Chivalry (Scrope v. Grosvenor)[14] in 1386, Glyndŵr knew the French would understand, that through signalling those particular Arms, he bore a family blood line connection to the late Princes.

PERPETUATING THE MYTH

The Heralds have since maintained their stance supporting the original lineage reported by the Commission,[15] however other recent authors opted to follow Bridgeman and Lloyd's lead and deny Catherine's existence.[16,17] Of those, only some have offered reasoning, whilst the others[18,19,20] simply state that Llywelyn II had just one daughter named Gwenllian who was taken by the Crown to live her life as a nun at the priory of Sempringham.

Davies is one of those who in his book of 1995, *The Revolt of Owain Glyndŵr*, denies the existence of Catherine.[16] He wrote that Owain's claim as the heir of Gwynedd was: 'only true in a figurative and political, not in a precise genealogical, sense'. It is however hard to imagine that Glyndŵr, when preparing letters of state to the French king, would write 'figuratively', especially since the king probably already knew of his relationship to his late cousin, and particularly when he knew that in such

matters, misrepresentation was an offence under chivalric law.

Another author to deny the existence of Catherine is Bollard.[17] His essay in *Owain Glyndŵr. A Casebook*, published in 2013, argues that the one and only Philip ab Ifor married a second daughter of Llywelyn I with the name Angharad. He cites Bartrum (Cy ap Gw1),[21] however Bartrum in a separate folio (Gr ap Cy4) places a query against the bond, and moreover Bartrum fails to provide a source reference for the elusive relationship which cannot be traced elsewhere. Bollard also relies upon an early manuscript known as the *Stemma Aliciae* collected by the Somerset Herald Robert Glover dated 1570-1577.[17] A particular entry in that manuscript for the lineage between Glyndŵr and Llywelyn II shows the wife of Philip ab Ifor being *Unica filia et hares*. Bollard interprets this as meaning Gwenllian not Catherine on the basis that *Unica filia* meant the *only daughter*. On that basis he condemns the pedigree. It is certainly a very weak argument, since the translation of *Unica filia et hares* surely meant *the only heiress.* Catherine was the only heiress since Gwenllian as a nun would have renounced her worldly inheritance, and neither could she marry. It seems strange that according to Bollard, Llywelyn II, at about sixty years old, who would have had succession on his mind, and who attended his marriage ceremony to Eleanor in 1278, had not sired a child with her before 1282, the birth date of his daughter Gwenllian.

CONCLUSION

This study of Glyndŵr's ancestry was undertaken to investigate the glaring discrepancies between the Heraldic documentation and modern literature. Several authors forcefully denounced his claim as the heir to Gwynedd by denying the existence of Llywelyn II's heir, citing impossible chronology and accusing Glyndŵr of using imprecise figurative speech. Their political intentions were however thwarted because the lineage through Llywelyn ab Owain, as recounted earlier in this article, and which they had not appreciated, had been missed.

Each of the arguments has upon examination, fallen short. Furthermore, the arguments do not present a consistent case with each other. It is therefore concluded that Glyndŵr's claim and the lineage through to Llywelyn II was authentic.

NOTES

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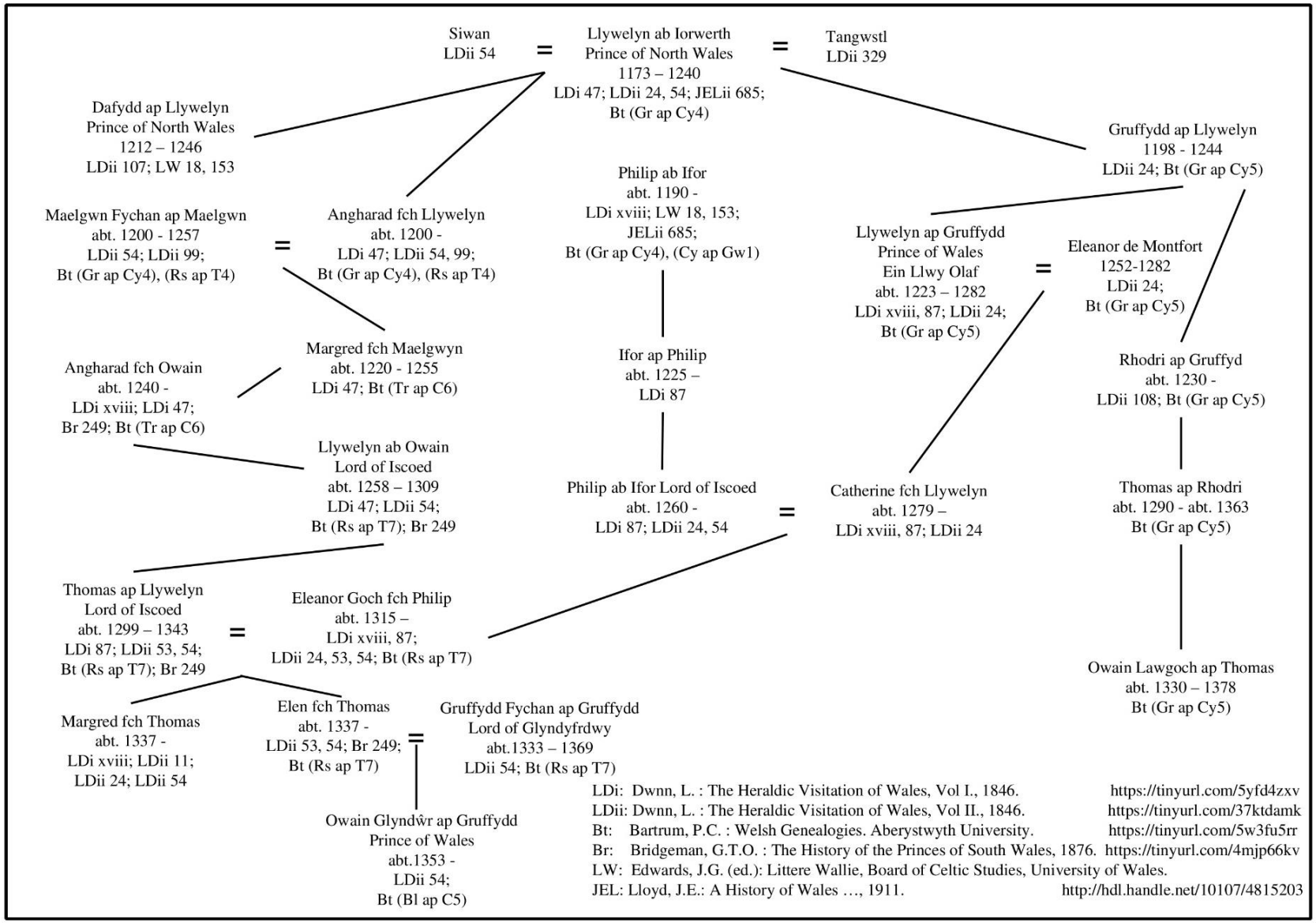
APPENDIX
Glyndŵr's Ancestry



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